Mutated Cities

This is a work of fiction.

Ivaline[REDACTED LAST NAME],Female
Name:Ivaline
Codename:000
Age:21
Height:165cm
Appearance:
-Medium length green hair
-Triple squared irises
-Inverted Hair accessories
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Knives
Ability:Telekinesis
Full ID picture below.

Ixeline[REDACTED LAST NAME],Female
Name:Ixeline
Codename:001
Age:22
Height:170cm
Appearance:
-Medium length green hair
-Triple squared irises
-Inverted Hair accessories
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Scythe
Ability:Telekinesis
Full ID picture below.

Soloenn[REDACTED LAST NAME],Male
Name:Soloenn
Codename:002
Age:22
Height:175cm
Appearance:
-White hair
-Star shaped irises
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Poison induced syringes
Ability:Poisonous blood
Full ID picture below.

Yiana[REDACTED LAST NAME],Female
Name:Yiana
Codename:003
Age:22
Height:164cm
Appearance:
-White and green hair
-Star shaped irises
-Semi-circular hair accessories
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Bow
Ability:Healing
Full ID picture below.

Loseana[REDACTED LAST NAME],Female
Name:Loseana
Codename:004
Age:21
Height:170cm
Appearance:
-Light purple hair
-Rhombus irises
-Rhombus hair accessories
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Staff
Ability:Astral projection
Full ID picture below.

Forynth[REDACTED LAST NAME],Male
Name:Forynth
Codename:005
Age:23
Height:181cm
Appearance:
-Black and blue hair
-Lunar irises
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Giant hammer
Ability:Fear induction

Full ID picture below.

Hexa[REDACTED LAST NAME],Female
Name:Hexa
Codename:006
Age:21
Height:163cm
Appearance:
-White and black hair
- X-shaped irises
- X-shaped bandaged hair accessories
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Daggers
Ability:Teleportation/Shield summoning
Full ID picture below.

Hysteria[REDACTED LAST NAME],Female
Name:Hysteria
Codename:007
Age:21
Height:161cm
Appearance:
-Dark purple and white hair
-Triangular shaped irises
-Triangular bow hair accessories
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Nunchaku
Ability:Mind reading
Full ID picture below.

Quixe[REDACTED LAST NAME],Male
Name:Quixe
Codename:008
Age:23
Height:180cm
Appearance:
-Black and grey hair
-Rectangular shaped irises
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Giant axe
Ability:Aerokinesis

Full ID picture below.

Xyne[REDACTED LAST NAME],Male
Name:Xyne
Codename:009
Age:22
Height:178cm
Appearance:
-Blond and red hair
-Pentagon shaped irises
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Scythe
Ability:Mind control
Full ID picture below.

Nether[REDACTED LAST NAME],Male
Name:Nether
Codename:010
Age:23
Height:179cm
Appearance:
-Light blue hair
-Circular shaped irises
-Customized Number member uniform
Specialized weapon:Pixels
Ability:None
Full ID picture below.

Chapter 1:Opening

Early in the year 2118

A certain video recording from the Sentient Building Research Center (SBRC):
“Starting injection of the modified human DNA through the reworked brick..” a researcher announced.
“We got a pulse.”Another one said.
Blurb...
“What was that noise?”
“It’s coming from the brick inside the capsule.”
...
“The mutation is complete.”
“Wait.. it’s spreading too fast.”
“The container broke!This is ba-AHHHH!”
“It..It absorbed him..”
“Everybody, evacuate the research center.”
Emergency evacuation routes lit up.
“Get the child out of here!”

~

Year 2134

This footage was recently recovered by the Explorers Unit.

Nether, also known as 010, listens to the video, memories of his youth threatening to resurface. 010 is the only person in the Technology and Maintenance Unit. Even so, the young man remains extremely proficient in his role. Also, he has highly light blue hair to match his profile.

On the other hand, Hexa’s eyebrows furrow lightly, deep in thought. Codename 006, she is part of the Research and Cure Development Unit. Her gaze remains analyzing, long white hair ending in black strands resting untied on her back.

“That’s the end of the clip,” she says, sighing in disappointment.
“No need to state the obvious,” Nether remarks using his usual laid-back tone.
“You were there when it happened, 010?” Hexa asks, trying to confirm if the kid in the footage was indeed 010 during younger days.
“Technically, yes. Going to question me to no end?”
“No, share whatever you want.”
“That’s probably all I’ve seen back then. In that specific timeframe of course,” he shrugs.

The girl closes the video with a click, moving to review the analysis written in a private online document written by the Explorers Unit. After reading the last line, 006 turns back to her colleague.

“Alright, you can leave now,” she nods.
“I’ll get back to my work then. Try not to drown in overthinking, 006,” he mentions it like an afterthought as he leaves.

Once Nether leaves with a knowing expression, Hexa falls into quiet contemplation.

“This clip is from 16 years ago, huh. Interesting, that was the start of everything we’re currently trying to fix.” She thinks silently.

In fact, a long time has elapsed since the team has been working on an antidote to restore the city. However, it wasn't successful. After all, she still remembers the first test.

~

Soloenn (002) injected PrototypeCureOne (the result of their research, development and editing of the serum), into the core formation of the petite mutated building.

A second later, the house collapsed. All signs of synthetic life in it, dead. Hexa casted a protective shield around everyone to safeguard them from debris that are falling.

~

She shakes her head out of the lingering memory as she makes her way to her hexagonal shelves to organize some files. Then, 006 opens a virtual chat screen that appears before her on her wrist. When ‘Chat’ activates, it transcripts the voice of each Number to the screen. The young woman reads its messages to check their task progress;

Chat:

008: We’ve used PrototypeCureTwo on Base2!
010: No, you didn't.
008: Kidding.
003: We're just at an abandoned sentient house.
004: So how’s the test going?
007: No casualties so far!

~

Back at the assignment site, Hysteria (007) and Quixe (008) are inside a sentient cabin to test PrototypeCureTwo. The small establishment, deserted with rusty walls, dim lighting and mutated wood in every corner seems to give off a sinister sight out of a horror movie.

They inject the serum into the core transformation (the zone where the mutation starts) of the building and it suddenly explodes, leaving acids and corpses scattered all over.

Chat:

003: Guys, are y’all alive?
008: We're fine, our bodies and heads are still functional. It’s a pretty
unique experience.
003: And the rest?
007: They’re literally almost ripped to shreds.
003: That is not reassuring. I’m coming.

Yiana (003) heads inside the building to heal them, restoring 007 and 008 back in one piece. When done, they all head back to their headquarters.

~

“What exactly happened?” Hexa questions.
“The serum blew off the cabin,” Quixe exclaims proudly in his lighthearted voice .

“I thought that could be prevented if the testing stages were done.” 006 says sternly.
“Our Unit was too lazy to do them,” Hysteria admits, looking sideways.
“Well, testing *is* better in live action,” he claims.

“It’s called ‘testing stages’ for a reason. It’s to prevent damages like these from happening.” Hexa continues with her small reminder.
“Someone’s real fun.” Quixe mutters sardonically.

Hexa exhales in exasperation before dismissing them.

~

In the meantime, 000 (Ivaline) and 009 (Xyne) meander through an abandoned laboratory far from their headquarters. They collect samples of the transfigured construct, fight off any incoming attacks and patrol the area to note down potential core locations. That is the usual task of the two members of the Explorers Unit. Once finished, the two of them head back to report to Hexa about their findings. Only then will 006 issue new assignments.

Chapter 2

Year 2134

Assignment #131
Objective: Stop the spread of the mutated area.
Location: XXXX
Member(s) dispatched: 003, 006, 010

The following day 003, 006 and 010 all stood at the entrance of the laboratory. 003's eyes widened even though she knew the location beforehand. Before Nether could ask the slightly frightened woman anything, 006 shot him a silencing look.

They head into the building, steps soundless, hiding their presence. The research center was eerily quiet. With dissolved human beings inside capsules coupled by shattered broken glass and windows, it gives away a sense of dread. On each side lay hallways accompanied by blood, continued mutated material supporting the ceiling decorated by flickering lights.

Yiana stops, scanning her surroundings. The scene almost looks the same compared to the days she has been here. Back then, she was trapped inside an experimental capsule equipped with multiple tubes and wires attached to her. Scattered guards

and scientists shrouded her, brightness flashed over her and multiple windows neatly arranged and covered with binds in order was present. Now, this place remains desolate.

003 hurries her pace to catch up with them while both of the two other members give her a suspecting expression. The establishment senses the mistake, suddenly blanketing it by secretions of hydrochloric acid. 006 summons three shields, blocking each attack, protecting all of them from the liquid as they fasten their search for the core of the mutated sentient building. Once they have it destroyed using PrototypeCureOne, the building gets unstable and collapses, leaving behind a pile of deceased transfigured substances.

“You’re unusually silent, 003. Why?” Nether finally asks curiously .
“This is the lab that I helped 003 and her brother, 002, escape from.” 006 replies in her stead.
“No further elaboration?” He prods.
“We were basically used as an experiment,” Yiana explains, her voice a bit sour.
“Got it,” is all he says.

Hexa halts. Footprints were present near the exit. Not theirs.

“This wasn’t mentioned in the report from the Explorers Unit,” the white and black haired girl notes.
“Which means it’s recent,” 010 remarks, eyes narrowing.
“It’s similar to your shoe size, 006.” 003 comments.

Their leader, 006, considers it. This is a slim chance that this belonged to her sibling. She makes a mental note to analyze its implications later. *This is not a good sign.*

~

“I’ll be rotting in my room,” Nether says with a lazy salute, already off.

“I’ll be drawing,” Yiana nods as she also heads to her respective room. Codename 003, she is in the Experimental Cure Testing Unit. White hair accompanied by bangs and by green strands at the end, they’re attached in two loops on her back.

Meanwhile, Hexa opens the Chat screen via the piece of technology on her wrist as she senses a buzz coming from it. A notification.

Chat:

000: 006, we’re done with investigating the transfigured suburb.
009: We’re going to send you the details when we get back.
006: Noted, be careful.

Later in the evening, she checks the report sent by 000 and 009.

Task investigation—Explorers Unit
Location: XXXX
Member(s) dispatched: 000, 009

Nothing unusual happened. Everything is in accordance with what we know.

“Informative as usual,” Hexa mutters, issuing a new task.

Assignment #132
Objective: Stop the spread of the mutated area.
Location: XXXX
Member(s) dispatched: 005, 008

~

Chapter 3

Year 2134

“This is the house we used to live in,” Quixe notes while sauntering around a room.
“I didn’t expect the mutation to spread all the way to the suburbs.”
This young man is part of the Experimental Cure Testing Unit. Codename 008, black hair fading with grey framing his face.

“There’s traces of blood in this place..What exactly happened here?” Forynth asks.
“Oh, my parents were killed.” Quixe says casually like it was a random Tuesday.
“Unfortunate, by whom?” He questions, voice careful.
“No use for revenge, they were killed by me.” The boy replies with a small smile which earned a confused gaze from 005.

“It’s a short story, don’t worry about my progenitors.” 008 continues speaking as he narrowly avoids a flying acid blast nearing his way, countering the still-incoming strikes by creating a windshield using aerokinesis.

Forynth casts fear induction on the much-alive house, paralyzing it for an hour.

“Maybe I should’ve done that at the beginning,” 005 mutters to himself.
Codename 005, Forynth belongs to the Research and Cure Development Unit, having black and dark blue hair in addition to his features.

The two use a detection device to track the core of the transfigured area. It works by analyzing the concentration of mutated cells per square meter. The higher the cells, the closer it is to the zone where the mutation starts. The specific location is also hinted by its colours, a deep shade of red and pink. The moment it is located, 008 creates a circular shield made of strongly dense air around the core in case any debris were launched. 005 injects the serum in the core, bypassing the barrier as his teammate allows it.

Then, as expected, the house shifts. Presently fallen.

Chat:

005: Our task is done. I’ll do the report and it will be submitted in five hours.
006: You read my mind~
008: You’re lucky 005 is punctual when it comes to this.
006: Unlike someone.
008: Oh, give me a *break.*

~

During the night, Hysteria (007) takes a stroll through a nearby park alone. Tonight, she and Xyne (009) are on patrol duty.

The silence allows her former times to bubble up, every innocent life she took. The girl would always blame herself for murder by the Unknown Forces orders. She fled the organization when her brother was killed for not complying.

Member of the Experimental Cure Testing Unit, codenamed 007, Hysteria’s dark purple and white hair tied with two long loose pigtails undulate in the light breeze.

“Pondering again?” Xyne asks casually behind her.
“You could say that,” she replies, a dose of tiredness in her voice. “Just contemplating the famous meaning of life.”
“If it helps, my meaning is like a blank canvas where you can decide your own path.” He says.

She notes the thought of that. Until now, life for her was only about survival. Perhaps there's still things to be discovered on this 'blank canvas' after all.

"Thanks for sharing your thoughts."
"I'll be here for any further discussion," he adds.

~

Hysteria wakes up the next day having to pry her eyes open, vaguely remembering what happened last night.
Recently, she has less and less control of her recollections. Sometimes, she can't even recall events that occurred the day before. Her mind is getting dizzier, her memories mixed up.
007 should probably mention that to the Research and Cure Development Unit to see if they have any drugs to help with recollecting and aligning her memories.

As Hysteria trudge to the Unit, she's greeted by Hexa, Forynth and Ixeline.

"Anyone have drugs for memory recovery? Feeling kinda weird recently, haha. Nothing much going on though, don't worry." 007 says.
"We do have one, though it's still in testing, wanna be a victim of our research?" Forynth asks sadistically.
"Sure, I have nothing to lose," she replies.

Forynth injects the serum in the tester's arm and all the memories come flooding back to her.

~

Late in the year 2120

007's first memory swallows her. It was her first target. She knocked the two victims out using her usual weapon, a nunchaku. Because it was immensely heavy, their lives were lost in an instant.
Her eyes closed, she smashed, hit, twisted and their heads with her raw strength. As a result, red splashed every corner of the room. The sound of the flesh spattering everywhere and the scent of the fresh blood made her nauseous.

Then comes another disturbing memory: the loss of her brother. The leader of the Unknown Forces had promised her that no harm would ever go to her family. Hysteria was forced to see her sibling chained to the wall, being stabbed a hundred times through his body, crimson liquid dropping to the floor.

~

Year 2134

She deeply regretted trusting those shady people, blindly following their orders to keep her family safe. She should’ve known better– if she never did, maybe her brother could have lived to see another day. Hysteria opens her eyes, other memories occurred too but those two are the most prominent ones. The woman can feel her recollections coming back, slowly but steadily. Looks like the serum was a success after all…

Chapter 4

Year 2134

Quixe staggers as his somber memories and inner doubts cloud his mind. 005 observes him for two seconds, then attacks him by hurling his weapon towards his opponent for the light spar.

The dazed victim, instantly aware of his predicament, snaps out of it by forcing his brain to concentrate on the present.

“If this is how your Fear Induction affects me, then I’ll sleep fine tonight.” 008 says as he raises his large axe, his preferred weapon in which he manipulates with ease, to stop the downward swing of 005’s hammer that was thrown at him.

“You sleep fine every night.” Forynth replies steadily while launching forward and attempting a sidekick to his opponent’s stomach.

Quixe sidestepped just in time to avoid it. At the same time, 005 catches his giant hammer, the offensive tool Forynth found most aesthetically pleasing, and swings it, aiming at the head. The latter ducks.

“Practicing your offense today?” 008 comments, stepping back swiftly to create distance.
“Yes,” 005 replies shortly as he dodges windblades from Quixe’s doing.

A second later, their spar was cut short when 006 interrupted the two of them.

“Alright gentlemans–” Hexa starts.
“Gentlemans? Since when did you become so flattering?” Quixe asks with a bit of mockery.
Forynth sighs. “Ignore him, just go on, 006.”
“A new assignment is issued,” 006 announces.

~

Assignment #133
Location: XXXX
Objective: Stop the spread of the mutated area.
Member(s) dispatched: 006, 005, 008

The new assignment was simple: neutralize an infected zone of a small city. Once Hexa, Forynth and Quixe step into the destination, the contaminated area immediately launches attacks on the small group. Various poisonous spikes, acid blasts and deformed roots were going in their way.

006 occupies herself by shielding the group, summoning smaller versions of the shield in different places, while 008 navigates them through the air. The condensed wind carries them above ground, avoiding strikes coming from land. 005 was scanning for the root of the mutation.

“I don’t see the heart of the mutated zone yet,” Forynth said.
“Maybe you’re colorblind. They’re usually in a shade of magenta,” Quixe teases.
“Currently your face right now. If 004 was here, it would make things easier scouting wise,” 005 voices.

“Not falling for that provocation. Besides, if she *was* here, we would have to protect her unconscious body while she uses her astral projection.” 008 replies.
“The heart is there.” Hexa speaks shortly while looking at the virtual map on her device.

Quixe guides them over and the three of them jump off. Weirdly, the core wasn’t attacking them. A lone figure stood in front of it, the wind ruffling their dark clothes.

She finds herself face to face with Exa, someone whom she clearly recognized. The latter offers Hexa a small smile.

“Miss me?” The figure spoke, voice soft, words sharp, making 006’s eyes narrow.
“I’m afraid I can’t let you neutralize this area, personal project, you see..I’m sure you can understand that, dear sister.” Exa continues in her gentle voice, yet her stare is hawk-like.

“The similarities are uncanny,” 008 remarks quietly.
“Fair point,” Forynth mutters.

“Still with the Unknown Forces. The mutation infected your brain.” Hexa reminds the girl in front of the trio.

“Well received. Will you do something about me, or let your feelings get in the way?” Her sibling poses.
“You already know the answer," 006 replies steadily as her expression stays unreadable, concealing her inner dilemmas.

“Killing me it is then. If that's the case, I won't back down either.” Exa speaks calmly as she takes out her sword dripping with lethal poison.

Hexa appears behind her, the dagger aiming for her neck. Her sibling predicted the attack, spinning around in rapid speed to parry it with her sword. Both women's abilities and weapons clashed, the sound almost deafening. They launch strike after strike at each other, blocking and countering every one of them with accuracy.

“Be more original, I’ve watched countless shows where the character appears behind their enemy.” Exa says, earning a deadpan stare from 006.

This time, her sister vanishes and appears right above 006. She swings her sword downward. Her sibling sidesteps, dodging the attack. Hexa didn’t miss a second as she threw a dagger at Exa’s neck. However, it got deflected by the opponent’s shield. As 006 steps forward to catch her bounced off weapon, a sword strike presents itself again, in which she dodges at the last minute by jumping back.

While she naturally guides Exa far from the core of the mutated area, Forynth quickly administers a serum into it, making the area lifeless.

“Oh? I’ve falled for a simple trick?” Exa exhales in disappointment, suddenly aware that Hexa used the distraction created by adrenaline against her.
“Guess I have no more business here. Seems like my superior won’t like this developpement,” she mutters before disappearing.

The other sibling continues to be on guard for a few moments. When there’s no more incoming attacks, she lowers her weapons warily.

~

Chapter 5

Year 2134

Exa appears within her headquarters as she finds herself faced with Rethen, her superior. The female assistant approaches him with a small smile, speaking leniently.

“The Numbers have successfully destroyed the experiment in the area that I was assigned to.” She reports bluntly.
“I see. That implies they discovered it without being noticed by the radar of the location.”

The young woman nods, then leaves his office. Strolling along the corridors, Hexa's sister contemplates tracking the location of her enemy’s base. When that is accomplished, she will make sure to eradicate every last one of the members of the Numbers. After all, the Unknown Forces share one belief: if humanity is the source of the Earth’s problems, then the solution to kill this race is through mutated cities. This ideology didn’t appear overnight; it was the direct consequence of the SBRC’s earliest experiments.

~

The Sentient Buildings Research Center (SBRC), now known as the Unknown Forces (UF), gave a goal to themselves to create buildings that could communicate and have the same intelligence as human minds. Nevertheless, their project backfired on them when a transfigured brick (a combination of modified non-carbon based life with a DNA fragment of a human brain through synthetic nanotechnology and biology) consumed a living human being as a fuel for biomass energy using its roots. In the aid of that energy, the mutated entity absorbed more fleeing humans, grew, and eventually morphed the whole establishment.

~

Chapter 6(Interlude)

Year 2134

Ivaline (000), Loseana (004) and Xyne (009) wander along the mutated area they've been tasked to scout. The air reeks of decaying human flesh mixed with the acidic smell of living deep purple colored mutations.

004 extends her consciousness out of her body to explore while mapping the location on a software that displays a three dimensional grid.

In the meantime, the other two stay behind, guarding Loseana's unconscious body. Ivaline's pair of knives floats beside her in aid of her telekinetic powers. Xyne whips out his scythe.

~

The drifting spirit wanders through the zone, passing through walls and infected corpses like mist. It didn't take much time before she stopped. There was someone in front of her.
The silhouette didn't sense 004's consciousness— one perk of having astral projection as her ability. 004 observes her pointed ears, sparkling irises and sparkle patterned outfit.

~

000 and 009 both received a notification from the Chat screen. Ivaline opens it. It reads:

Chat:

004: We're not alone here.

They both pause. Then Xyne begins typing.

Chat:

004: We're not alone here.
009: Elaborate.
004: There's someone we don't know injecting something in the core.
000: Another person experimenting on transfigured towns? Interesting.
004: I'm done mapping the area, let's approach her carefully. We never know
     if she's a threat or not.
000: Agreed.

~

The mysterious dark green haired figure turns around as she's surrounded by the three members of the Explorers Unit.
"Your clothes look familiar," the elf observes quietly. "Associated with the Numbers perhaps?"

"Why asking?" Ivaline questions back.
Codename 000 and member of the Explorers Unit, she has medium length green hair tied in a loose ponytail.

"Just making sure I'm not facing my enemies," the unknown person says.

"Even if you are our enemy, we're not here to kill you." Loseana states matter-of-factly.
Her codename identifies as 004, also in the Explorers Unit with light purple hair attached in two long braids behind.

"Oh? Even if I'm with the UF?" She challenges the trio dangerously, summoning her weapon: a dual-bladed naginata.

That is no ordinary researcher, they realize, she is also combat-trained. Engaging her without necessary information might lead to potential team injuries.

"Retreat." Xyne commands sternly, reminding them that they are on a scouting mission, not a fighting one. This man's codename is 009, blond hair ending in red strands.

~

Later, a report was sent to Hexa.

Task investigation—Explorers Unit
Location: XXXX
Member(s) dispatched: 000, 004, 009

A new Unknown Forces member discovered. Elven ears, sparkle shaped irises and sparkle patterned outfit. It is possible that she specializes in handling dual bladed naginatas. It seems that the woman is experimenting in location XXXX.

Chapter 7(Interlude)

Year 2134

Inside one of the Numbers' laboratories lies the Research and Cure Development Unit. The room is immersed in bright lightning with sterile material. It is mostly quiet, save for the sound of machinery and calm conversations.

006 puts different mutated construct samples through the decontamination and disinfection process. Then Ixeline tests a variant of PrototypeCureTwo: PrototypeCureTwo-B. It is a biological fluid consisting of materials capable of dismantling the modified side of the mutations, or so it seemed. They contain kinds of enzymes, graphene oxide, DNA origami structures and molecular sieves. The mixture has a custom buffer system, surface functionalization of graphene oxide.

Nevertheless this was all about the execution.

"Starting injection," 001 voices.

The experimental specimens all have various reactions, noted in 005's lab report charts,written in his neat caligraphy:

Chart 1: Reactions of the mutated constructs when injected with PrototypeCureTwo-B

Sample number	1	2	3
Reaction with the variant of PrototypeCureTwo	It becomes chemically unstable, interacting with surrounding molecules.	It collapsed too quickly. The buffer system struggles to maintain pH. Might harm healthy	DNA origami structures fail to recognize this type of mutation.

		tissues.	

After they have stopped further damages, the trio let out a collective sigh but maintain their resilience towards finding the cure.

“Should we still let the Experimental Cure Testing Unit run a trial for this cure in real-time?” Ixeline suggests, curious of the consequences despite herself. Codename 001, member of the Research and Cure Development Unit, she’s Ivaline’s sister, possessing untied medium length green hair.

“It’s unsafe, considering the results we have here.” Forynth reminds her.
“We’ll be fine,” Hexa says.
005 let out a displeased sound. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you guys.”

~

All people of the Experimental Cure Testing Unit; Quixe, Hysteria, Yiana and Soloenn stood at the entrance of a mutated small cabin. Once 006 successfully wraps them all in a shield, 008 carefully administers PrototypeCureTwo-B on the core. For a short while, nothing happened.

Short moments later, it collapses too quickly. An expected response from the modified building, Hexa notes mentally.

“This is worse than the previous prototype, it destroyed the tissues.” 007 comments while shaking her head.
“The former one just rendered them deceased without any damage,” 003 adds.

“Who suggested this test?” 002 asks. He is Yiana’s older brother. Real name being Soloenn, the adult has white hair and a few strands of green on the upper part.

~

Back at the base, Nether was busy repairing the laboratory–the one used by the Research and Cure Development Unit. After witnessing so many of the failures' aftermath, he wonders if the cure is ever out of reach.

Chapter 8

A day in the life of everyone, more or less:

Explorers Unit:
Ivaline(000), Loseana(004), and Xyne(009) explore uncharted territories, each with their weapons and deep understanding of the mutation's behavioral patterns. Their task is to analyze whether these newly discovered zones show traces of infection. As they navigate through assigned areas, they collect samples, scan for anomalies, and note down environmental transfiguration if possible. Their reports will determine the next location to assess if needed.

Research and Cure Development Unit:
Ixeline(001), Forynth(005), accompanied by Hexa(006) review samples received by the Explorers Unit. They study, investigate as well as stimulate it in order to obtain certain effects. For example, 006 might inject PrototypeCureTwo into several extracts of the mutation to examine their different reactions. 001 being often the idea generator and tester, Hexa occasionally creates new substances, while 005 writes down the results. Even so, the group's principal objective is to find a universal cure that works for all modified cities.

Experimental Cure Testing Unit:
Quixe(008), Hysteria(007), Yiana(003) and Soloenn's(002) main duty is to evaluate whether the PrototypeCure works or not by testing it on sites scouted by the Explorers Unit. Upon arrival, they will inject the serum in the core of the mutated zone and closely monitor its aftermath. Depending on the building's response, 002

will note it. The squad have different roles: 008 is the action-taker, followed by 007. 003 as the healer and 002 being the supervisor and note taker.

Technology and Maintenance Unit:
Nether(010) is responsible for crafting and refining weapons, maintaining the team's advanced technologies and ensuring the base functions properly. He develops gear, upgrades equipment, and occasionally repairs damaged infrastructure, making sure everything,from broken syringes to other systems,operates smoothly and safely. Basically the backbone of the Numbers.

~

When going on missions to neutralize mutated cities, any Number suited for the task will be up for it. They will temporarily abandon their Unit to fit into their new roles.

Chapter 9

Year 2134

Xyne and Forynth happen to be in a forgotten mutated city. The sinister view of it came to their eyes. Repulsively formed buildings, broken pieces of human limbs dipped in pools of stomach acids along with withered nature and ominous silence.

The two members of the Numbers wander through the fragmented streets, scanning the environments, searching for the zone where the mutation starts. As they investigate an establishment, 009 abruptly gets absorbed in the flesh of a house. However, Xyne uses his scythe, slashing through it as he frees himself. 005 isn’t surprised by his friend’s skills, he has witnessed them countless times before.

They approach the heart of the transfigurated section, ready to inject PrototypeCureTwo. In spite of that, the haunting area senses their existence, shooting burning acids towards them. Xyne and Forynth expected such a reaction, their honed instincts dodging each shot with ease. In lightning speed 009, administers the syringe into the area and the whole sentient city is completely destroyed bit by bit.

Suddenly, a mutant beast attacked Xyne as he narrowly deflected it using his weapon. The black and blue haired man attempts to use his supernatural skills on the animal but it strangely backlashed, hitting the blond individual instead.

“Shoot, hang in there 009, I’ll take care of this.” 005 asserts without any hint of stress.

009, affected by Forynth’s Fear Induction, starts getting overwhelmed by painful memories of his past. What he buried deep inside of him simmers below the surface. The loneliness, his neglected childhood…All those flashbacks hit him like cold water to his face. Eventually the effect wears off and Xyne staggers, losing consciousness as he slumps to the ground, causing 005 to check up on 009 after he defeats the creature.

“Earth to 009..Wake up,” Forynth says as he shakes his friend's shoulder. Earning no response, the man sent a message to the Chat screen.

Chat:

005: 006, I have a sleeping body by my side, mind coming over to help out?
006: Is that your way of describing 009? Alright, I’m on my way.

A while later, Hexa teleports the two of them back to headquarters.
Xyne wakes up in his room, disoriented by the change of scenery, “006 must have brought us here,” he thought.

~

Soloenn was meandering in a forest, analyzing the environment for any traces of genetically modified animals. After the attack that occurred to 009, 006 sent him to investigate, but he had uncovered no clue, not even the carcass of the beast. His sister, 003, meets up with him at the entrance of the area, as they are both done patrolling.

Chat:

002: 006, there’s no sighting of transfigured species in this area.
003: Although we did find some pretty mushrooms.
006: Huh?
003: Speaking of mushrooms, did you know that they’re genetically closer to
     animals than plants?
002: Let’s not get off topic.
006: It’s fine, come back to the base then.

~

“The experiment was a success! The mutated area can form a mutated beast after this injection,” the pointed eared woman speaks brightly.
“Very well, submit the report by 12 AM.” Rethen orders.

The elven creature– Xiera, nods as she heads to her office, sparkle-patterned dolman swaying as she walks.

Experiment #1—Unknown Forces Department
Location: XXXX
Objective: Observe and analyze if the mutated area can form a mutated beast
capable of deflecting fear inducing abilities after injecting
Serum#1.
Member(s) dispatched:Xiera

Five suspected members of the Numbers were located on location XXXX. Three of them retreated after our encounter. However, on the following day, while I was spying the area from afar, two of them dismantled the core. It did leave enough time for it to create a mutated beast capable of deflecting fear inducing abilities after injecting Serum#1 though.

Chapter 10

Year 2134

A meeting occurs within the conference room, the common area where all Numbers gather to communicate ideas, theories or information. At its center sits a large rectangular table alongside customized types of chairs that belong to each person, all created by Nether. The soundproof walls surround the space as the tapping sounds of shoes fill the air, all members entering the room.

“The Unknown Forces, UF in short, are former members of the Sentient Building Research Center, or SBRC, if you’re using the acronym. Half affected by the mutation that reached their brain, they believe that the transformed urban areas are the future of this world, since humanity is the cause of all sources of destruction on Earth. They’re our natural enemies,” Hexa starts when they’re all seated.

“The point?” Nether interrupts in a lazy tone.

“Will be, that we’re going to investigate and predict their next moves. Reason is, three assignments showed their involvement near mutated areas,” 006 finishes.

Xyne speaks up next. “They managed to counter 005’s ability with some sort of magical beast or something, being the target of the backlash wasn’t what you’d call fun.”

“Don’t remind me, it was real trauma.” Forynth says sarcastically.

The group goes on with the meeting. During analysis, different theories are voiced.

“Imagine that the SBRC synthesized us to stop the spread we’re facing now.” Hysteria suggests.
“You’re saying that we’re born in a lab?” Ixeline speaks with interest in her eyes.
“Let’s not bring an existential crisis right now, people,” Nether adds knowingly.

On one hand, interpretation oriented people make decisions to decide the group’s next actions.

“The Unknown Forces most likely know our supernatural abilities for a reason.” Yiana notes.
“Either they spied on us while we were out there or someone here is working for them,” Xyne remarks casually.
“Classic. Any other possible reasons?” Loseana inquires in this little brainstorming session.
“Exa knows 006’s thinking and uses it to predict our moves?” Soloenn comments.
While on the other hand, individuals leaning towards strategic choices are being discussed.

“Considering that they’re starting to mutate other beings like animals to deal with our abilities, we’re going to need to start studying their components to develop something against it.” Hexa suggests.

“And maybe I’ll start questioning a certain UF’s assassin that 010 and I captured while on patrol.” 008 says, eyes full of questionable intentions.
“I pity the assassin.” Forynth mutters.

“I guess I’ll work on our security blueprints with 010,” Ivaline finally speaks up.
“Let’s hope that the coding collaborates with us magically without issues.”

~

010 walks out of the meeting, a bit disheveled. 007's earlier comment struck a chord within him. As the son of the SBRC's CEO (chief executive officer), he knew everything they were aiming to achieve at a young age.

And that little hypothesis?
Shockingly close to the truth.

But he held back from saying anything, because if he accepted that truth, that the rest of the Numbers (except Nether) are indeed synthetic humans, then 010 can't play the part as their colleague anymore. Talking to artificial *homo sapiens* didn't exactly sit well with him. However, he must continue the show, because they are one of humanity's hope to stop mutated cities.

Chapter 11

Year 2128

Teenager Quixe realized something weird after attempting to kill his own parents. They were made of machinery. Everything seemed to fall into place. After all, he

rarely saw them eat, bleed, or even drink water. The next scene would upend everything he thought he understood.

“All I do will never be satisfactory for you isn’t it?” Quixe said with restrained irritation.
“Still giving me that nonsense, child? We gave you everything a child could ever ask for, and yet you still managed to disappoint us?” His mother spoke coldly.

His left eye twitched, frustration bubbling up. He heard this line too many times to count. The young boy was so done with all the expectations.

“Mind I remind you that I’m *not* perfect? Am I born only to fulfill your wishes?” Quixe shot back bitterly.

A slap to the child’s face.

“Don’t talk back to your Mother.” His father voices, tone stern.

Quixe snapped. A violent gust of condensed wind tore a hole through his parents heart.

They weren’t dead. They seemed to bug, as if recalibrating. The hot metallic scent wafted through the air.

The boy took a step back, eyes widened slightly in fear as he struggled to process this revelation. Were his parents trained robots? Artificial Intelligence, even? Was this a lucid dream?
Both of them school their expressions back to normal after glitching.

“Quixe. Go to your room.” They said at the same time, face slowly turning towards him in a way that sent a chill down his spine.

That night, he picked the lock to his caregivers’ room. In a swift movement after entering, he tossed the large bucket of water over them, causing the human-like machines to malfunction, and eventually, shut down.

~

Year 2134

008 notices 010’s silent demeanour when he exits the meeting. Curious, he asks Nether the reason behind his quietness.

“Something on your mind?”
“Nothing important.”
“You were talking with 007 earlier, was it about that?”
“Lucky guess?” Nether asks, his tone revealing slight annoyance at being exposed despite his lazy smile.

“Connecting the dots isn’t exactly rocket science,” Quixe says with a smirk.
“Fine, you’re right, that theory did stir something in my head,” his friend admits begrudgingly.
“The one concerning us being synthetic? You actually believe it?” he snickers.
“How would *you* react if you were synthetic?”

“That’ll be pretty cool if you ask me.”
“I’m being serious, 008.” 010 responds with mild aggravation.
008 pauses before answering with a stoic expression. “I’ll accept it.”
“Of course you will,” Nether replies with a knowing look. “You’re not going to be a bit surprised?” He adds.

“No. After killing my own caregivers, I don’t think anything can rattle me.” Quixe declares, his smug demeanour back.
“Did you notice something strange about your so-called parents by any chance?” 010 inquires in a mix of curiosity and calculated interest.
“Lucky guess?” 008 retorts back with skepticism concerning his friend’s accurate statement.

The eager expression on the light blue haired man tells him everything about how this conversation will turn out.

Quixe lets out a small huff before continuing. “They were AIs, if I had to guess. The entire house reeked of machine oil after that little incident.”

He stopped talking for a moment, his mind filled with suspicion about how much Nether knows. “How did you know?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know~” 010 shot back in a teasing tone.
“Careful, 010, I can smell your deflection from a mile away.”

008 stand corrected, Nether *is* deflecting. An attempt to cover what he knows about the origins of behind the Numbers.

Chapter 12(Interlude)

Year 2126

Hysteria, Ivaline and Ixeline were in Hexa's soundproof room.

"We have some news," both of the siblings announced in a calm tone.

Young 000 and her sister 001 shared how they marked down the location of a desolate lab that contains potential to be a lead to their investigation. Rumours from the black market lead them to verify if that said 'lab' truly kidnapped young lads to run experiments on them.

"Alright, then we will need enough information to act thoroughly." Hexa responded.

————

Year 2126
Hexa's plan, part one: Information gathering.

Hexa: Firstly, 007 and I will enter through the main entrance by pretending to be government inspectors, which should work, because we *do* work for the government and have the necessary documents. 007 and I will be disguised. Meanwhile, 001 and 002 are in charge of watching our headquarters.

Hexa and Hysteria weave through the entire building exactly as planned. Aside from the high-tech environment and a few glances thrown their way as they passed by, nothing seemed out of ordinary on the surface.

Hexa: Then, we will explore the building and look at ominous rooms that need to be checked. However we must stop at, and pretend to not be suspicious about ominous looking rooms to avoid unnecessary attention. If we do, we might be viewed as threats. If that happens there's a possibility that employees there will force something upon us. After all, memory erasing serums do exist. 007 and I will act upon what we've found the following day.

———

Year 2126(The following day)
Hexa's plan, part two: Rescuing alive victims if there are survivors found.

19 years old Yiana was trapped inside an experimental capsule equipped with multiple tubes and wires attached to her. She observed the scene: scattered guards and scientists, lights flashed over her, multiple windows neatly arranged and covered with binds in order. The subject thought all hope was lost when the shattering sound of glass breaking of her capsule was heard.

In the blink of an eye, people of the area were all killed by a 18 year old Hexa who saved Soloenn first.

Also, 006 has unfortunately triggered the security alarm. 002 ripped the tubes and wires off her sister's body.

"Over here,this is the way to escape." Hexa indicated calmly.

The pair of siblings, along with their savior, evaded multiple traps like lasers and while running to the exit. That said, their destination had an army of men at the door.

"I'll deal with this, you two have to escape and find a place to hide, I'll go locate you guys later." she said quietly before beginning her assault on the guards.

Soloenn and Yiana both obeyed hesitantly and ran away when Hexa cleared an opening for them. A while later, 006, filled with cuts and various small injuries, found them.

"There you are, now come along and let's get you to a safe place."
"Hold on, let me heal you." Yiana said as she treated Hexa's wounds.
"Oh, appreciate it." 006 thanked her.
"Will the place be far from here?" Soloenn asked curiously.
"Yup." Hexa replied.
"Incoming!" Hysteria shouted as she landed the helicopter.

The small group headed inside the vehicle while it flew away to the headquarters of the Numbers. What they didn't know remains the fact that the individual monitoring the security cameras was Rethen.

Hexa's plan conclusion: Success, no one was murdered.
Hexa's personal note: All burnable disguises covering the body are burned, then dissolved, filtered and tossed into the ocean.

Chapter 13

Assignment #134
Location: XXXX
Objective: Stop the spread of the mutated area (large scale, containing
multiple cores.
Member(s) dispatched: 000, 001, 002, 003, ‘004’, 007, 009

The tactic to corrupt the widespread mutation is already in action.

At the edge of the area, where transfigurations focus more on development, lies 002 and 004. The young man uses a *Truck-Kun*, a dart gun containing syringes infused with lethal poisonous blood (his personal ability), to sever the immune system of the spreading entity. As expected, the incompatible blood and poison in the mutated area causes tissues to die.

On 004’s side, she occupies herself by annihilating any intrusions using her customized staff. In fact, her actual body never left headquarters. Basically, Soloenn sees invisible actions by Loseana. The latter however, interacts via Chat if needed.

Chat:

002: 004, thanks for your contribution.
004: It was as difficult as the depths of hell.
002: Sure.
004: That was sarcastic.
002: Same here.

———

The middle part contains 003, accompanied by 007. With the aid of mind-reading, Hysteria hypothesizes the large living anomalies’ next moves. Meanwhile, 003 focuses more on shooting the eyes of incoming mutations, occasionally launching three arrows at once. Then, it’s up to 007 to knock them out with her multi-accessorized nunchakus.

“Mwehehehe, murder~” Yiana laughs in action.
“Mwahahaha, and you’re down, and you, and you..” Hysteria notes with a sinister smile.

———

Amidst the main core stands 000 with 001 and 009.

“Interesting, I can’t control its mind,” Xyne says with a slight tilt of his head.

“Then we destroy it.” Ivaline suggests, ready for a massacre.

Before Ixeline could protest, her sister manipulates her knives in use of telekinesis. In a few slashes, the outer layer of the core opens, revealing something unpleasant. The core itself is fused with technology.

“Yeah. I’m destroying this thing.” 001 declares with finality.

~

Beep.
Status unavailable...
Connection cut...

“So they’ve shut down the heart I see..” Exa mutters, staring at the holographic projection.
“It’s no surprise, the contagion wasn’t subtle either,” Xiera nods expectantly.

Hexa’s sister closes the screen. It was time to move on to the other stages of the experiment.

———

Rethen steps inside one of their tech-heavy labs, footsteps silent. He takes a moment to assess their test subjects, almost approvingly. He speaks. “I assume that everything has gone well?”

The associate walks to the side in a gesture that allows his colleague to see their work. “Right, as usual. Issues were minor. Ever thought of contributing?”

Rethen shakes his head lightly. “Coaches don’t play.”

“Excuses, excuses,” voices the other man.

~

Assignment #134 Notice—Mixed Units
Location: XXXX
Member(s) dispatched: 000, 001, 002, 003, ‘004’, 007, 009

The cores contain various technology implants. Traces of lingering electricity remain after shutting it down. People implied in its construction will be terminated if found.